



Winner of Nine Pulitzer Prizes

## Editorials

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### **Editorial: Genesis Project needs reforming**

New, experienced leadership is needed for a King County drop-in center that serves as a refuge for victims of the commercial sex trade.

Seattle Times Editorial

A KING County refuge for young victims of prostitution and sex trafficking deserves better leadership than it is currently receiving from a veteran county sheriff's deputy.

Andy Conner should step down as executive director of The Genesis Project. He does not have the management or financial experience to run the SeaTac-based drop-in center.

Conner's inexperience was the focus of an FBI investigation that cleared him last month of embezzlement allegations, but dinged the nonprofit for shoddy bookkeeping and managerial practices.

In a previous editorial, Conner was advised to put in place strict accounting practices used by other nonprofits. He should also relinquish control of Genesis' finances, which have grown. From August 2012 to August of this year, the nonprofit raised more than \$300,000 through online soliciting, an auction and walk-a-thon.

But Conner should not only separate himself from the finances; he should not run the organization at all.

Genesis plays too important a role in the battle against sex trafficking to see its reputation harmed by poor leadership. Women and girls escaping brutal pimps and the dangers of the streets rely on the hot meals, showers and laundry services provided by Genesis. The same goes for the organization's housing, job training and educational opportunities referrals.

Conner has paid himself a small stipend in the past for his Genesis work. The payment gives off an appearance of a conflict of interest because the girls and women who seek help from Genesis were often referred by Conner and others in law enforcement.

King County Sheriff John Urquhart has ordered sheriff's deputies not to refer anyone to the center until there are significant improvements in the way it is run. Urquhart also ordered the removal of any police images, including photos of law-enforcement officers, from the nonprofit's website.

Conner deserves praise for launching Genesis with sheriff's detectives Brian Taylor and Joel Banks. The three men were in a unique position to see the violent and abusive effects of street prostitution, and they reached out to help.

But the federal investigation found that internal conflicts between Conner and the Genesis staff and boardmembers forced many to leave, including Taylor and Banks. Now it is time for Conner to step back.

